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Peirce, Benjamin.

An oration delivered at Salem on the fourth of July 1812.

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AN

ORATION,

DELIVERED AT

SALEM,

ON THE

FOURTH OF JULY,

1812.

By BENJAMIN PEIRCE. 1778-1831.

SALEM:

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1812.

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SALEM, JULY 4, 1812.

DEAR SIR,

IN behalf of the Federal Republicans of Salem, we return you our ſincere thanks for the excellent Oration this day delivered by you, and requeſt you to have the goodneſs to furniſh us with a copy for the preſs.

NATH'L BOWDITCH,
EBEN'R PUTNAM,
JOHN RUSSELL,
JOHN PRINCE, jr.
LEVERETT SALTONSTALL,
GIDEON TUCKER,
WILLIAM MANSFIELD,
Committee of Arrangements.

Hon. BENJ. PEIRCE.

SALEM, JULY 4, 1812.

GENTLEMEN,

THE copy of my performance, which you do me the honour to requeſt in ſo flattering a manner, is reſpectfully ſubmitted to your diſpoſal.

I am your moſt obedient ſervant,
BENJ. PEIRCE.

NATH'L BOWDITCH,
EBEN'R PUTNAM,
JOHN RUSSELL,
JOHN PRINCE, jr.
LEVERETT SALTONSTALL,
GIDEON TUCKER,
WILLIAM MANSFIELD, *Eſquires,*
Committee of Arrangements.

AN

ORATION.

My respected Fellow Citizens,

GLORIOUS were the events and the termination of the revolutionary war. Glorious were the times, when the policy of Washington directed our national affairs. Ever sacred be the memory of those illustrious periods! May each successive anniversary of the birth-day of our nation faithfully recall them to the mind of every American. Never in the whole history of man have stronger claims existed to the richest offerings of the heart. Never was there greater propriety in the annual appropriation of one day to the celebration of past achievements.

Whether we regard the greatneſs, the ſplendour and the variety of thoſe tranſactions, which marked the riſe and formation of this weſtern empire; whether we regard the unparalleled proſperity, which attended its early progreſs under the auſpices of its immortal founder; or whether we regard the great characters, that were produced on this new theatre, and the exalted virtues, which were diſplayed by all claſſes of citizens; we at once aſſign to the infancy of our republick a rank with the moſt diſtinguiſhed periods of ancient or modern times.

Thirteen ſmall and diſtinct provinces, ſpread, and in moſt parts thinly ſpread, over a vaſt extent of country; unconnected by any permanent political aſſociation; diſcordant in their intereſts; unprovided with the appropriate means of war; abounding in no reſources but thoſe of intelligence, of valour, of patriotiſm, and of Providence; while the lukewarmneſs of multitudes was attempting to paralyze, and the

oppoſition of others was threatening to diſtract; undertook the mighty taſk of defending their rights by the ſword againſt the encroachments of a power, which, like the humble ſatellites of an immenſe orb, they had hitherto attended in her proud march among the nations; and which had recently been raiſed, by a moſt brilliant and ſucceſsful war with her great continental rival, to the very ſummit of human grandeur.

When we look back on a conteſt, apparently as unequal as that, recorded in the ſacred volume, between the ſtripling of Iſrael and the towering champion of the Philiſtines; we are aſtoniſhed at the intrepidity, which dared to commence it; at the perſeverance, with which it was carried on; and at the ſucceſs, with which it was crowned. Begun without encouragement from abroad, it was proſecuted without foreign aſſiſtance; until experience had demonſtrated, that the colonies were of themſelves able to maintain their liberties, and that fo-

reign aid was hardly neceſſary even to the eſtabliſhment of their independence.

Without attempting to enumerate the ſeveral cauſes, which, by the bleſſing of Heaven, ſucceeded the noble efforts of the Americans in ſo wonderful a manner, it may be uſeful to obſerve that the war, of which we have been here ſpeaking, was, to uſe the language of our excellent Governor, "a juſt and neceſſary war of ſelf defence." Every thing was contended for, that is dear to freemen. It was conſequently a popular war. It was a war, which came home to the boſom of every citizen. Each one felt himſelf immediately and vitally intereſted in its iſſue. One common ſentiment, one common feeling, pervaded all claſſes of men; and a ſpirit, a valour, an energy, and a determination, were diſplayed, which, we truſt, will, under ſimilar circumſtances, ever be diſplayed by the people of this country.

But while we are admiring the virtues, the ſervices, and the exploits, of our revolutionary patriots, let it never be forgotten, that the ſtruggle, which they ſo pertinaciouſly and ſo glorioufly maintained, was intended not merely for themſelves, but for their poſterity; and that the true way of bearing teſtimony to their merits, is to preſerve unimpaired the rich inheritance derived from them. Thoſe great and ineſtimable privileges, which are the offſpring of liberty, form at once the chief good of the nation, that poſſeſſes them; and the ſublimeſt monument to the memory of their brave defenders.

Never, ſince the eſtabliſhment of our independence, has it been more neceſſary, that we ſhould rally round theſe privileges, and exert all our powers in their defence, than at the preſent moment. Faction, that deadly enemy of free governments, now rages with unbounded licenſe. It convulſes the whole country to its centre, and threatens to proſtrate the fair fabrick

of our liberty. Power is the chief object of faction; and in the choice of its means for the attainment of that object, it is restrained by no considerations of patriotism or of justice. Hence that narrow policy, which has been so extremely at variance with the best interests of the United States. Hence those repeated violations of our national and state constitutions. Hence the inimitable proceedings of the *republican* lordlings of this commonwealth; and hence also (for faction is oftentimes too furious to be discreet) those egregious blunders, which have opened the eyes of the people to their real views; which, we trust, will effectuate their removal from that branch of the legislature, which they have dared to usurp; and long prevent them from regaining an unmerited ascendency. To the same source may be traced those multifarious political manœuvres, that juggling, legerdemain policy, which have so remarkably characterized our national rulers. Irresistibly attracted by the charms of office and of emolument, they appear absolutely to have forgotten,

that there is such a thing, as the general good. In what other way, on what other principles, can we possibly account for their measures? Had the publick good been consulted, we are unable to believe, that *theory* would ever have usurped, in the manner it has done, the prerogative of *experience*; that unworthy, pusillanimous compliances would have been substituted for a dignified course of action; that proclamations would have been relied on for the defence of our seaports; that commercial restrictions would have been used to beat down the most powerful nations on the globe; and that in the room of a respectable number of frigates and men of war, we should have had, for the protection of a commerce second only to that of Great-Britain, little more, than a miserable swarm of contemptible gun-boats. Had the publick good been consulted, our rulers would never have cherished in themselves, and cultivated in the people, partiality to one foreign nation, and prejudice against another; they would not, by abject servility to France, and by hectoring defi-

ance to England, have increaſed the difficulties of our neutral ſituation, and courted a participation in their ſanguinary conteſts. Had the publick good been conſulted, our miniſter at London would have been authorized to renew that treaty, which had been negotiated by Jay, and approved by Waſhington ; a treaty, under which our commerce had flouriſhed beyond all example ; a treaty, which we might have had at this very time, and it is ſaid, with ſome melioration ; but which had been ſo much abuſed by Mr. Jefferſon and his partizans, that they never could forgive it. Had the publick good been conſulted, we ſhould never have combined with other powers for the deſtruction of our own commerce ; we ſhould not have exhibited the aſtoniſhing ſpectacle (however dignified in the view of a political dreamer) of a great maritime nation withdrawing ſuddenly and entirely from the ocean ; contracting and folding up her huge arms, which had encircled the whole globe, and united her with its remoteſt regions ; and, from pure hoſtility to the violators of her neu-

tral rights, abandoning all thoſe immenſe advantages, which ſhe might have continued to enjoy. Had the publick good been conſulted, the United States in all human probability would not have been reduced to their preſent wretched ſituation. Do we wiſh to be ſatisfied of this? Let us then take a glance at the courſe, which has been purſued, ſince the eſtabliſhment of the general government. That the adminiſtration of Waſhington was preciſely the one, which the circumſtances of the country demanded; that it was calculated to promote her beſt intereſts in the higheſt poſſible degree; cannot at this period require to be demonſtrated. Enlightened and juſt and honourable, as it is now univerſally acknowledged to have been; fruitful as it was of bleſſings to the whole community; bright as its glories beamed upon the ſurrounding univerſe; it had, nevertheleſs, to encounter a hoſt of internal enemies. Unable to prevent the adoption of the conſtitution; and perhaps enraged at the diſappointment of their gloomy predictions concerning it; they laboured to

wreſt it from the cuſtody of its friends. To accompliſh this nefarious purpoſe, every mode of attack was practiſed, which ingenuity and malice could invent. Their great engine was the preſs, which poured down an inceſſant ſhower of abuſe and calumny. The principal functionaries of the government were denounced; their deſigns were repreſented as dangerous to publick liberty; every exertion was made to deprive them of the confidence of the people. Becauſe an erect and dignified poſture was carried towards foreign powers; becauſe energy and rigid impartiality attended the execution of the laws; becauſe thoſe methods were reſorted to, for maintaining the rights, the intereſt and the honour of the country, which have received the ſanction of univerſal experience; they were declared to be the friends of arbitrary power. Becauſe Preſident Waſhington invariably preſerved the dignity of his ſtation; becauſe on public occaſions he always would appear in a decent garb; becauſe he delivered ſpeeches, inſtead of ſending meſſages, to Congreſs, at the

commencement of each ſeſſion; becauſe for the ſake of economizing his time, and devoting the greateſt poſſible ſhare of it to the ſervice of the publick, he aſſigned certain hours of certain days to the reception of viſitors, who then crowded his rooms in ſuch numbers, as to bear ſome reſemblance to the levees of the great in Europe; for ſuch *weighty* reaſons he and his adviſers were ſeriouſly branded as enemies to our republican inſtitutions.

But the deadlieſt weapons were ſupplied by the French revolution. Upon the breaking out of the war between France and England, a neutral poſition was wiſely choſen by our government; and all its duties were faithfully and ſteadily diſcharged. But that attachment to France, and that hatred to England, which ſprang up during the revolutionary conteſt, and which were ſeduloufly ſwoln by the arts of deſigning men, bore down upon that ſyſtem and upon its authors with incredible fury. Nothing but the unparalleled popularity of

Waſhington, added to his unſhaken reſolution, could have ſupported the government againſt the violence of the torrent. Supported by him, it remained immoveable. "The rain "deſcended, and the floods came, and the winds "blew, and beat upon it; and it fell not; for "it was founded upon a rock." Waſhington at length aſcended to the ſkies, and (pardon the alluſion) his diſciples were ſcattered. Then commenced a new order of things. Philoſophy took poſſeſſion of the chair of ſtate; her head teeming with ſublime viſions, which bade defiance to the maxims of common ſenſe; which laughed to ſcorn the accumulated wiſdom of ages; and to diſplay the practical operation of which our country has ever ſince been the ſubject of one continued courſe of political experiments. Has economy in our publick expenditures been the object of theſe experiments? The moſt thoughtleſs and extravagant profuſion could not have been more injurious, than ſuch an economy. It has indeed ſaved us the expenſe of a ſuitable naval eſtabliſhment, and of

adequate fortifications on our ſeaboard. But it has greatly diminiſhed the wealth of the country; it has impaired our reverence for the laws; it has impoveriſhed our treaſury; it has ruined our commerce; and, from his flight among the ſtars, it has brought the American eagle to the ground.

Foreign aggreſſions have been invited by our unarmed and defenceleſs ſituation. Neglecting to aſſume an attitude, calculated to command reſpect, we have become the ſcorn and opprobrium of the world. The ſpirit, formerly manifeſted when injuries and inſults were heaped upon us by France, taught that nation a leſſon, which, but for the ſubſequent obſequiouſneſs of the government, ſhe would have long remembered. Since that glorious period, far different counſels have prevailed. France was not long in perceiving the change. She ſoon found, that ſhe could with impunity trample upon our rights and our honour; and ſhe has availed herſelf of the occaſion to the uttermoſt of her

power. She has committed upon us outrages without number and without parallel. She has violated the moſt ſolemn engagements; ſhe has robbed us of millions of our property; ſhe has burnt our ſhips upon the ocean; ſhe has impriſoned our fellow citizens; ſhe has compelled other nations to adopt her ſyſtem of violence and rapine; ſhe has driven us from the ports of Italy, of Denmark, of Pruſſia; and by the war, which ſhe is now carrying on with Ruſſia, ſhe aims a death blow at our remaining commerce to the continent of Europe. No circumſtance of indignity, of injuſtice, of perfidy, has been wanting to aggravate her enormities. A nation, from which we have received ſuch unexampled provocations, has yet had the addreſs to turn our vengeance from herſelf, and to direct it againſt her enemy. Yes, fellow citizens, can it be realized? we are at war, not with France, but with Great-Britain! and this at a time, when we are wholly unprepared for war with that power; when our treaſury is exhauſted; when the mercy and the magnanimity

of the enemy are the only ſecurity for our ſea coaſt; when millions of our property, and thouſands of our ſeamen, are abroad with nothing to protect them againſt the cruiſers of the miſtreſs of the ocean, but a force, brave indeed, yet too inconſiderable to deſerve the name of a navy.

War with England—Alliance with France—What horrors are contained in theſe words! Our beloved country fighting the battles of the great enemy of the human race! A free people combining with a ferocious tyrant to enſlave the world! A nation, which but yeſterday repelled the daring violators of the ſoil, now dead to the unparalleled diſtreſſes of Spain and Portugal, ſtruggling for their exiſtence! This nation muſt now aſſiſt the legions of their cruel and inexorable foe. We are to aid thoſe hordes of infuriate ravagers, that, like wolves and tigers, pour down from the Pyrenees, ſcattering every where devaſtation and diſmay. We are to aid a monſter, who hangs over that ill-fated region, like the genius of deſtruction.

——————— "What terrors round him wait!
"Amazement in his van, with flight combined,
"And sorrow's faded form, and solitude behind."

We are at war with the land of our fathers; with the bulwark of our religion and of our independence. A fierce and bloody conflict is to rage between two nations, most intimately connected together by blood, by manners, by laws, by religion, by literature, by the freedom of their political institutions; two nations, who in many important respects are mutually dependent on each other; and whose true interests would be promoted in proportion as the relations of amity between them were cherished and maintained. These kindred nations are destined, by a destructive and deadly conflict with each other, to subserve the views of a power, which is the common enemy of both; to aggrandize an empire to which they have no affinity, no resemblance; an empire, which is the seat of irreligion, of profligacy, and of despotism. Let it not be said, that we are not yet in alliance with France. Whether in alliance with her or

not, we are fighting her battles. But, fellow citizens, an alliance with that nation muſt eventually take place. It is impoſſible for two powers long to contend with the *ſame* enemy, and perſeveringly to decline the advantages which would reſult from concert in their operations. Neither reaſon, nor experience, would juſtify an expectation of ſuch a courſe. We ſhall, therefore, ſooner or later, be in alliance with France. We ſhall concur with the terrible Napoleon in the ſupport of the continental ſyſtem; and he in return will ſend us ſhips and ſoldiers. What uſe will be made of theſe French auxiliaries, whether to conquer Canada, or to keep us in ſubjection, may be beſt known to the infatuated men who have brought us into our preſent deplorable ſituation. One thing we all know, that every republick, which has been drawn by the ſeductive arts of France, into an alliance with her, has been enſlaved. From their fate let us take warning. It is not yet too late to ſave the country. The friends of peace are unqueſtionably able to bring

this war to a ſpeedy termination. It is a war againſt commerce; as ſuch it muſt, it will be regarded, by the people of the commercial ſtates. There can be no doubt, therefore, that the northern and eaſtern ſection of the Union is oppoſed to the war. Let immediate meaſures be taken to place this fact before the eyes of our national rulers. Let the friends of peace come forth; let them diſplay themſelves; let them demonſtrate, by their numbers and by their ſpirit, that the war, inſtead of being ſo popular, as its authors may have been led to believe, by the intereſted and ambitious men to whom they have lent their ears, is odious to a great majority in this part of the country; and that *ſame* love of power, which occaſioned the war, will produce an immediate peace.

Few, if any of us, fellow citizens, have ever witneſſed a period ſo dark and diſconſolate as the preſent. We are involved in a war, which we believe "unneceſſary, unjuſtifiable and impoli-

tic." What diſaſters are to mark its progreſs; when, and what, is to be its termination, are queſtions, which may well excite the moſt fearful apprehenſions. Much blood will be ſpilt; perhaps our own blood, and the blood of thoſe deareſt to our hearts. Multitudes in eaſy, and in affluent circumſtances, will be reduced to indigence. Would to God that theſe evils, dreadful as they are, were the worſt conſequences to be apprehended! But, fellow citizens, let us direct our views to that great and good Being, who was the never failing ſupport of our pious anceſtors in their times of trouble. Let us regard this awful calamity as an indication of his hot diſpleaſure at our follies and our crimes. Let us by divine aſſiſtance immediately renounce and forſake them. Then will an indulgent God extend his arm for our relief; and our ſorrow will be changed into joy.

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